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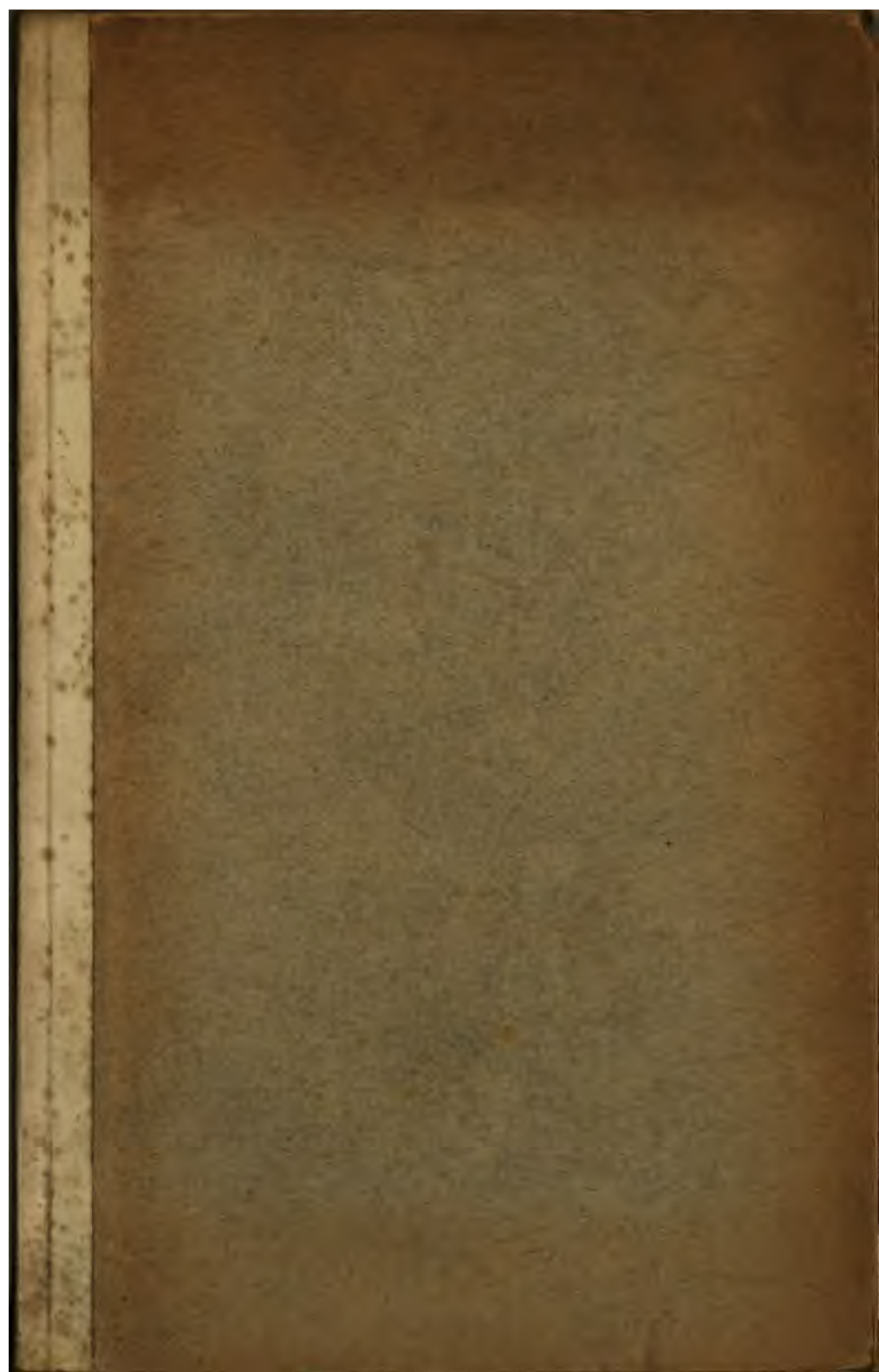
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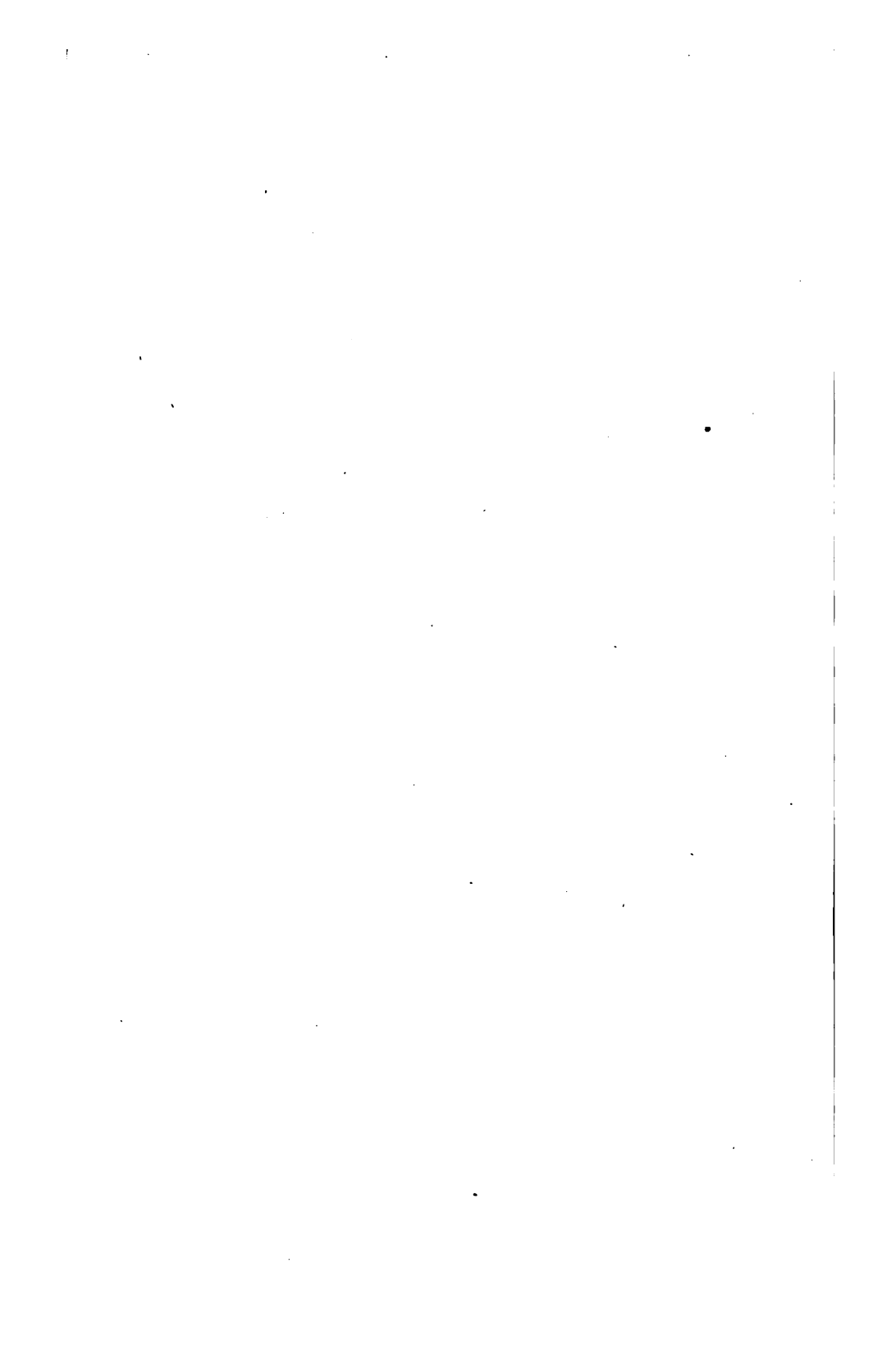
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The Grieving of the Spirit.

6
A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE

CHURCH OF ST. MARY-THE-VIRGIN, OXFORD,

ON WEDNESDAY, *March 4*, 1863.

BY

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The Grieving of the Spirit.

EPHESIANS iv. 30.

“GRIEVE NOT THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD.”

WE all know the general terms in which the Bible sets forth the conflict going on between good and evil, between the Tempter and the tempted. But what is meant by this special warning of the Apostle, planted as it is in the midst of a series of the most homely and practical exhortations?

Two things are said in this short sentence. One is that we do wrong to “the Spirit,” “the Holy Spirit,” “the Spirit of God,” (τὸ Πνεῦμα, τὸ Ἅγιον, τοῦ Θεοῦ); the other is that we do wrong to the Spirit of God by “grieving” Him, by causing Him sorrow.

To each of these points I desire to call your attention.

I. First, what is meant by the appeal of the Apostle, in this conflict of the soul, to *the Holy Spirit of God*? It is always instructive and edifying to ask why, in the Bible, one turn of expression is used rather than another, what is the reason of the preference of one phrase to another, seemingly of the same general intention. Most evidently is

this the case in the sacred words which express the doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

From certain points of view, we see, we are told of nothing except the Love, the Power, the Providence, of our heavenly Father. From another point of view, we see, we are told of nothing except the Life, the Death, the Resurrection, the Character of our blessed Lord. From a third point of view, we see, we are told of nothing except the work and influence of the blessed Spirit. Each of the Three has indeed, so to speak, the same background :—"The Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one: the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost." But each Divine Object, as viewed by itself, seems for the moment to shut out from our view everything else. The description of each, whether we use the Latin name *Persona*, or the Greek name *Hypostasis*, is of sufficient substance and force to occupy the whole horizon of our vision. We have but to stand in one of three positions, and each of the Three for the moment represents to us the whole Godhead. It is in the third of these positions that we stand to-night, and during the whole course of these sermons. It is the third of these Divine Names on which I have to dwell; and I cannot sufficiently impress on theological students the importance of studying the exact force and meaning of the word, *the Spirit*, the *Holy Spirit*, as it is used throughout the Scriptures; significant always, but, in our

own times, of absolutely peculiar significance. He who has thoroughly grasped what he means, or what he ought to mean, when he says, "I believe in the Holy Ghost," has obtained the master-key to the special difficulties, the true solution of the special questions of modern times and of the coming age.

The speculative applications of this great doctrine I reserve for other occasions. I confine myself now to the practical application made of it by the Apostle. What is meant when he refers us for our safeguard against evil, not to the love of the Father or to the grace of Christ, but to our communion with the Holy Spirit? He means this—That there is a power not out of ourselves, but within ourselves, resting on no external proof, but on its own internal evidence, deep-seated in our own innermost conscience and consciousness, which is no less than the power and presence of God Himself. Those good thoughts which dart across our souls we know not whence or how, those flashes of a better light than that which we meet in common every-day life, those tender emotions and noble instincts which shrink from the presence of everything base, or treacherous, or impure; that stern voice of conscience which rules, and condemns, and approves, what we do, and think, and say;—these are not the mere passing, fleeting results of this earthly human frame; they are the breathings, the messages, the expressions, the intimations of the near Presence of Almighty God, the Lord of heaven and earth. If we listen to them, we are

on His side; if we refuse to listen to them, we place ourselves on the side, it may be, of success now, but of total, hopeless failure at the end. In that wonderful account of the first battle of the Crimean war*, which many of us, I doubt not, have lately read, it is maintained that "the turning moment of a fight is a moment of trial for the soul, and not for the body; and it is therefore that such courage as men are able to gather from being gross in numbers can be easily outweighed by the warlike virtues of the few. . . . According to the grand thought which floated in the mind of the churchman who taught to the Russians" (so the historian of the battle draws out this remarkable thought) "their form of prayer for victory, there are Angels of Light and Angels of Darkness and Horror, who soar above the heads of the soldiery destined to be engaged in close fight, and attend them into battle. When the fight grows hot, the angels hover down near to earth, with their bright limbs twined deep in the wreaths of smoke which divides the combatants. But it is no coarse bodily help that these Angels bring. More spiritual than the old Immortals, they strike no blow, they snatch no man's weapon, they lift away no warrior in a cloud. What the Angel of Light can bestow is valour, priceless valour; a light to lighten the path to victory, giving men grace to see the bare truth, and, seeing it, to have the mastery. To troops who are to be blessed with victory, the Angel of Light

* Kinglake's *History of the Invasion of the Crimea*, i. 458.

seems to beckon and gently draw them forward to their destined triumph."

Such is the account given of an actual battle by an eyewitness, who had the genius to see into the inner causes of success and failure. But, if it be true of the conflict of physical forces in war, how much more is it true of the conflict of the moral forces in the soul. There, indeed, it is no external agency which will help us; it is the Holy Spirit of God working with and through our spirits. It is not on physical force, or worldly station, or applauding multitudes, no, nor even the oracles of human authority, however venerable, nor the advice and support of friends, however dear, that we must lean in the last resort. We must lean on God and on our own souls; on God in our own selves; that is, on all that is best and purest in ourselves; that is, on the strength and the light which can be given only by the indwelling of the Divine Spirit itself, not in the mere outer chambers of our opinions, or our manners, or our language, but in the very innermost sanctuary of all, our hearts, our consciences. Give us this, O God, and Thou givest us everything. Give us Thyself to enlighten, elevate, strengthen. Give us Thyself not in nature only, not in history only, not in Thy fatherly love only, not in Thy redeeming grace only, but in Thy close communion and fellowship with our own souls, and minds, and judgments. Make our wills strong with the strength of Thy will; make our hearts holy with the freshness of

Thy holiness ; make our judgments independent with the independence of Thine own eternity ; make our souls in their search for truth to be " safe under Thy feathers, for Thy faithfulness and Thy truth shall be our shield and buckler." This, and nothing less than this, we ask of Thee in all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth, in all our thirst for knowledge, in all our sense of ignorance, in the war which we have to fight, in the decision which we have to decide, in the solution which we hope to find for our thousand difficulties. This is what we have to seek. Within ourselves, not without ourselves, in the court of our own consciences, which is the throne of the Holy Spirit of God, must each decision be made for good or for evil in that struggle, which gives its true value to life and to death, across the dark river, and through the tangled thicket, and amidst the flying shots, and up to the distant height, where we shall stand at last victorious through the might of that blessed Spirit, which is indeed " our Refuge and Strength, our very present Help in trouble."

This, then, is the scene of our main conflict,—our own hearts and souls. This is the main support to which we must look,—God's Spirit working with, and through, and in, our spirits, by those gifts, and impulses, and breathings of moral strength and spiritual purity which are parts of His own essential nature.

II. And now comes the other word in the Apostle's warning. He describes, in a figure no doubt,

but still in a figure full of life and force, how it is that this sacred Guest and Friend is, if I may so say, affected by the movements, the unconscious, unintentional movements, of our own hearts and spirits. "*Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God.*" He does not say "*Resist not the Spirit,*" or "*Quench not the Spirit,*" or "*Anger not the Spirit,*" though he might say all of these. He says, and this is the point to which I have to invite your thoughts, "*Grieve not the Spirit.*"

Forgive me if I venture to explain this figure of the Apostle by an illustration which draws out in a living image the thought which lies hid in his emphatic phrase.

There is a well-known German picture, representing a young man playing at chess with the Tempter of his soul. He is intent on his game; his head is leaning on his hand; he sees only the moves of the pieces immediately before him; he thinks that he still has the play in his own grasp. Opposite to him sits the exulting Fiend: there is a look of triumph over the easy prey; already piece after piece has been taken: here a good deed is gone; there a prayer has been removed; there an act of faith; there an act of love; there an act of hope. A few more successful moves on the Tempter's side, and the game is won,—and the soul is lost.

But there is yet another Figure, which gives to the scene at once a deeper pathos and also a ray of hope. Behind the young man, unseen by him, unnoticed by the Tempter, stands the Guardian

Angel. The wings are spread for flight; the face is already turning away. It is a face not of anger, not of disappointment, not of despair, not of resistance, but of profound compassion and grief.

That picture represents to us well the state of many amongst ourselves; it represents also the meaning of the mournful, strange, almost singular expression of the Apostle, "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God."

I have said that our condition is, or may be, like that of the young man in this familiar picture. We may see him in many forms, in many stages of life: not perhaps here in this church, or now at this moment; but often elsewhere, often before or hereafter. He is in the midst of his companions. He is the life and soul of the party. The guests are full of fun and play. The evening wears on, and the conversation and the mirth grows faster and louder: and then comes the very temptation of which the Apostle is speaking in the chapter which contains this warning,—*"Corrupt communications."* *"Corrupt,"* (*σαπρὸς*): it may be only that worthless, rotten, foolish talk, which has no direct mischief, but which weakens, unnerves, dissolves the strength of our souls. *"Corrupt:"* it may be that darker, defiling current of ambiguous stories, and filthy jests, and loose songs, which gladly lend themselves to the ready lips of him who speaks, and are caught up gladly by the ready ears of those who hear. He plunges into this downward stream; he sees nothing but the excited faces of his hearers; he hears

nothing but the peals of laughter which he calls forth. But behind that roar of merriment there is a sadness which is not of this earth. There is a sadness of the departing Angel of Light, to whom every word so uttered is a pang of misery. There is a sadness such as would cloud the brow of father, and mother, and sisters, were they there to hear; not anger, not even disgust, but deep, unutterable grief. There is a sadness which even in the intervals of this loud and wild talk pierces his own soul, and which breaks in upon him with a deadly faintness when the tables are cleared and the guests are gone, and he is left alone to think of the nonsense and filth with which he has polluted and degraded his own lips, or the friends whom those foolish, wicked words have misled, and wronged, and defiled, and corrupted.

Or shall we follow him a step further than words? Has that game still gone on? Has the Tempter carried off not words only but acts? Has the young man, still unconscious, still with his head as it were between his hands, still thinking no evil, still meaning no mischief,—has he been led across the fatal threshold? Has he been plunged not only into words, but deeds of darkness—dark, deep, entangling sins, which drag on a long train behind of concealment, and extravagance, and misery, and shame? There are many warnings that might be used. But I repeat this one of the Apostle. Think not of the disgrace, or the defilement, or the loss,—but think of the *grief*, of the *sorrow* that follows. Think of the sadness, deepening, and ever deepening

still, on those beloved faces of which I spoke before,—of father, mother, brother, sister. Think of the pang which will shoot across your own soul, in the sudden shock that rouses you at night, or the first bitter waking thought of the morning. That sadness, those pangs, are but the shadows of the sadness which broods over the Holy Spirit and Mind of God, as He sees the work of His hands destroyed, as word after word and act after act disfigures, corrupts, and ruins the spirit which was His appointed dwelling-place.

Or look at another scene. Most perhaps of those who hear me would turn a deaf ear to those temptations of which the Apostle speaks. But there is another game which the Tempter can play. The young man is yet more unconscious than before,—of easy good-nature, of high generous spirit, perhaps of great capacities, of grand hopes, and great opportunities. He is there,—he sits in his room,—surrounded with comforts and luxuries. Hour after hour comes and goes, and he cares not to use them. All these golden Oxford years, which contain the promise of his future usefulness, are stolen away from him by the Enemy, not through vice, not through mischief, but through sheer indolence, and reckless idleness. He lounges from room to room; he leans out of his window; he hangs by his door; he loiters by the street, or the gate, or the quadrangle; and piece by piece, year by year, term by term, and week by week, those precious hours are snatched away, and he leaves this place worse

educated, worse instructed than he came; he enters on life worse prepared for its trials than had he never set foot within these walls. He looks back on nothing mournful, or disgraceful, or painful; all seems to have been easy, and sunny, and joyous. So it seems. But is there not here also a sadness, a grief in the background? not, as in the former case, sharp, acute, and piercing, but yet a sadness which creeps even over our earthly friends and our own memories, when we think what labour, what care, what money has been spent on our education, and spent, alas! almost wholly in vain; a sadness which in its fulness can only belong to that Divine Mind, which sees the future as well as the present, which sees with the vividness of omniscience what we might have been and what we are not. Ἐχθιστὴ ὁδύνη,—the bitter grief which sees the evil which it cannot repair, and which it cannot prevent. For we cannot repair the loss of the irrevocable past, and to restore that past to us is the one task which, as the ancients said, even God Himself cannot accomplish.

Or go a step higher yet. There are those who have yet greater destinies, and whose lives seem even now, in some measure, to correspond to those destinies. There is the youth blameless in act, zealous in study,—with a mind or with a character which, if all go well, must exercise an ennobling, elevating influence over the circle in which he will hereafter be placed; over the prospects, it may be, of the whole coming generation.

Rejoice in him ; hope for him.

But here, also, the Tempter has his hand on the chessboard. That blameless, gentle youth gets entangled in the meshes of some absorbing enthusiasm, or one-sided system ; or he shuts himself up within some narrow circle ; or he unwinds for himself unconsciously, almost mechanically, those cords which bind him to God or to his brethren : he drops, if he be of a mere intellectual turn of mind, the blessed charities of home, or the blessed moments of morning and evening prayer, or those exalting, invigorating, soothing influences of the more sacred ordinances of Christendom, from which few, very few, can part without feeling a deep and serious loss ; or he breaks away, if he be of another disposition, from the genial intercourse with his fellow men ; he learns to despise his old friends ; he looks with suspicion, jealousy, irritation, on all that is better, and freer, and grander than that which falls within his immediate vision.

And so the ardent student dwindles away into a captious, critical cynic ; and so the kind, loving, gentle, humble companion of our youth grows up into a hard, narrow, supercilious dogmatist ; and so the generous philanthropist stiffens into a worldly, eager, bitter partisan ; and he whose mind was once open to all the approaches of truth,—to whom truth was once dearer than any worldly interests, or any selfish aims, or any cherished fancies,—loses his hold upon it ; he becomes satisfied with any argument, however feeble, in behalf of what he wishes ; he becomes

indifferent to any consideration, however noble, which disturbs or contradicts his accustomed habits of thought or life.

And so God's work which should have been done by these, or the like of these, and which can be done by no one else, is left undone, and the world and the Church groan and pine for them, and groan and pine in vain. Surely "this too is vanity and vexation of spirit;"—vexation and grief to the spirit of man, but vexation and grief, multiplied a hundred-fold, to the Holy Spirit of God. A lost opportunity; a lost life; a loss which, in the sight of God, leaves a scar on the face of the whole generation,—this is indeed a blow to the Spirit of Truth, and the Spirit of Goodness. We do indeed, as we come across such cases as these, seem to hear not indeed the one piercing lament that mourns over one lost soul, but something which is more pathetic still,—“the long sorrowful wailing sound” which is described, after a hard-fought battle, “as though it had been wrung from the heart of brave men defeated^b ;” the tokens observed with bitter grief by the historian of the last days of Jerusalem, the awful signs of departing Deity, when through the Temple courts was heard, or thought to be heard, the motion, the sad despairing cry, as of a great multitude, saying “Let us go hence.”

I have dwelt on this side of the conflict between good and evil, because the text invites it, and because it is well for a moment to be recalled not

^b Kinglake's *History of the Invasion of the Crimea*, ii. 332.

merely to the serious, but to the tragical side of human sin; to be reminded not only of the anger and the love, but the grief of Him whose Spirit is not merely despised and outraged, but vexed and grieved, as with a father's or a mother's grief, as, one by one, His armies of good thoughts, and noble words, and just intentions, seem to be withdrawn or driven off either from the individual soul or from the collective spirit of man. "The Lord *repented* that He had made man, and it *grieved* Him at His heart." Deduct from this expression all that you will of figure, metaphor, and analogy, yet still it remains a sublime and pathetic expression of one side of the Divine Nature and of the Divine Providence. Not once only, but often in the course of history, must this Divine repentance have brooded over the world, and the Heart of God been grieved at the failure of the noblest characters, at the waste of the fairest opportunities, at the relapse and retrogression of a whole nation, a whole generation, a whole race of mankind from the mission which lay before them.

"My Spirit shall not always strive^c with man." Such is the result which the sacred writer ascribes to this awful Penitence of God. These great opportunities for good come once in a man's life, and do not return. They come once in a century, nay, we may almost say, they come once only in an age. The generation, the century, the age itself, may be

^c Gen. vi. 3, 6. The substance of this will be true in whatever way we interpret the Hebrew word translated "strive."

like that unconscious victim of the Tempter's arts. It may oppose to the Spirit of God no violent resistance, nothing but the force of inertness, of inactivity, of incapacity, the *vis inertiae* of human nature. But the effect is the same. "The Spirit is grieved," "vexed"^d, thwarted, driven away by the unsympathetic, unrecognising, unconscious opposition, and the opportunity comes no more. These, and such as these, are the sad freaks of human nature that make angels weep. This, and such as this, was the prospect which drew tears from the eyes of Him whose Spirit we seek to win. "He, when He beheld the city, wept over it, and said, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong to thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes^e."

This, then, is the lesson which I wish to leave upon your minds,—the sorrow, the profound grief, which strikes here and there, even in places where you least expect it, even into the very Heart of God, even into the very counsels of His Providence, even into the very movements and yearnings of His Spirit, by your undesigned, unconscious, unintentional omission, ignorance, forgetfulness, apathy, pre-occupation, prejudice, want of presence of mind, want of forethought, want of care for yourselves or for others.

The time is coming when you will be sorry for it. You have spread sorrow far and wide already; at last it will reach yourself.

^d Isa. lxiii. 10.

^e Luke xix. 42.

Yet I would not so leave the subject altogether. For, if you can grieve the Spirit of God, you can also rejoice the Spirit of God.

Even that long, sorrowful wail, of which I spoke before in the battles of earthly warfare, is not without hope,—“it is the cry of those who are not content to yield.” And so much more in spiritual warfare. There is the rush of joy in your own hearts and in the courts of Heaven, when you have recovered your lost game: there is the joy which irradiates the faces of all whom you know and love when the prodigal returns, when the angels welcome back the penitent sinner¹: there is a deep joy which reaches up from man to God, and down from God to man, when the courageous rebuke or the silent look has put to shame the filthy jest or the ill-natured sarcasm; or when the idle, careless, spendthrift youth shuts his door against intruders, and turns over a new leaf, and makes good use of the time that still remains to him; or when the blamelessness and guilelessness of youth grows up stedfastly along with the honest, mature, sincere mind of the full-grown man; or when an unexpected sorrow, or trial, or vicissitude of life once more opens the soul to the returning Spirit of Holiness; or when the reading of a new book, or the question of an innocent child, or the inquiry of a simple peasant, tears asunder the veil which kept out the Spirit of Truth.

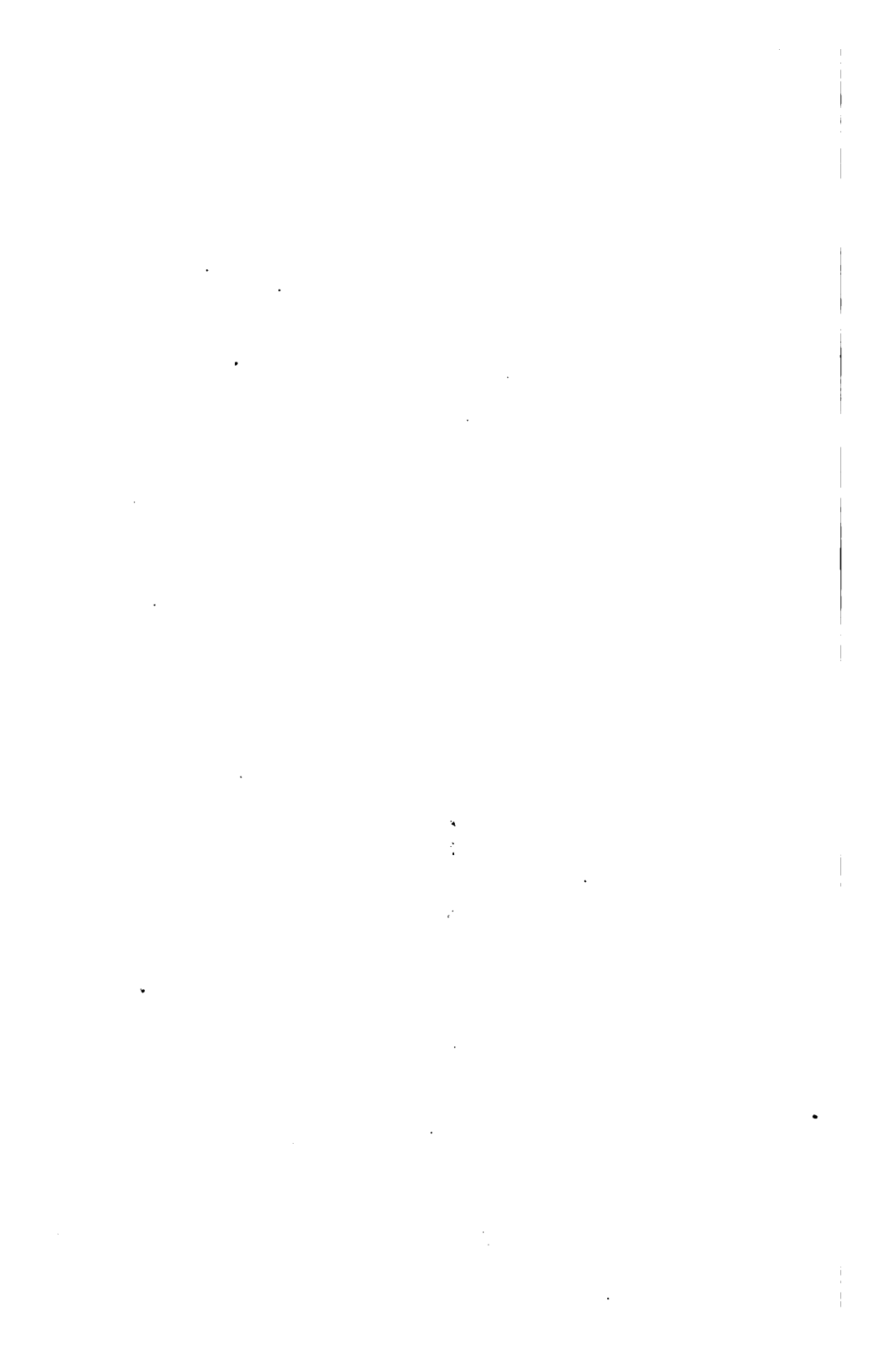
Then we see the true happiness of man, then we

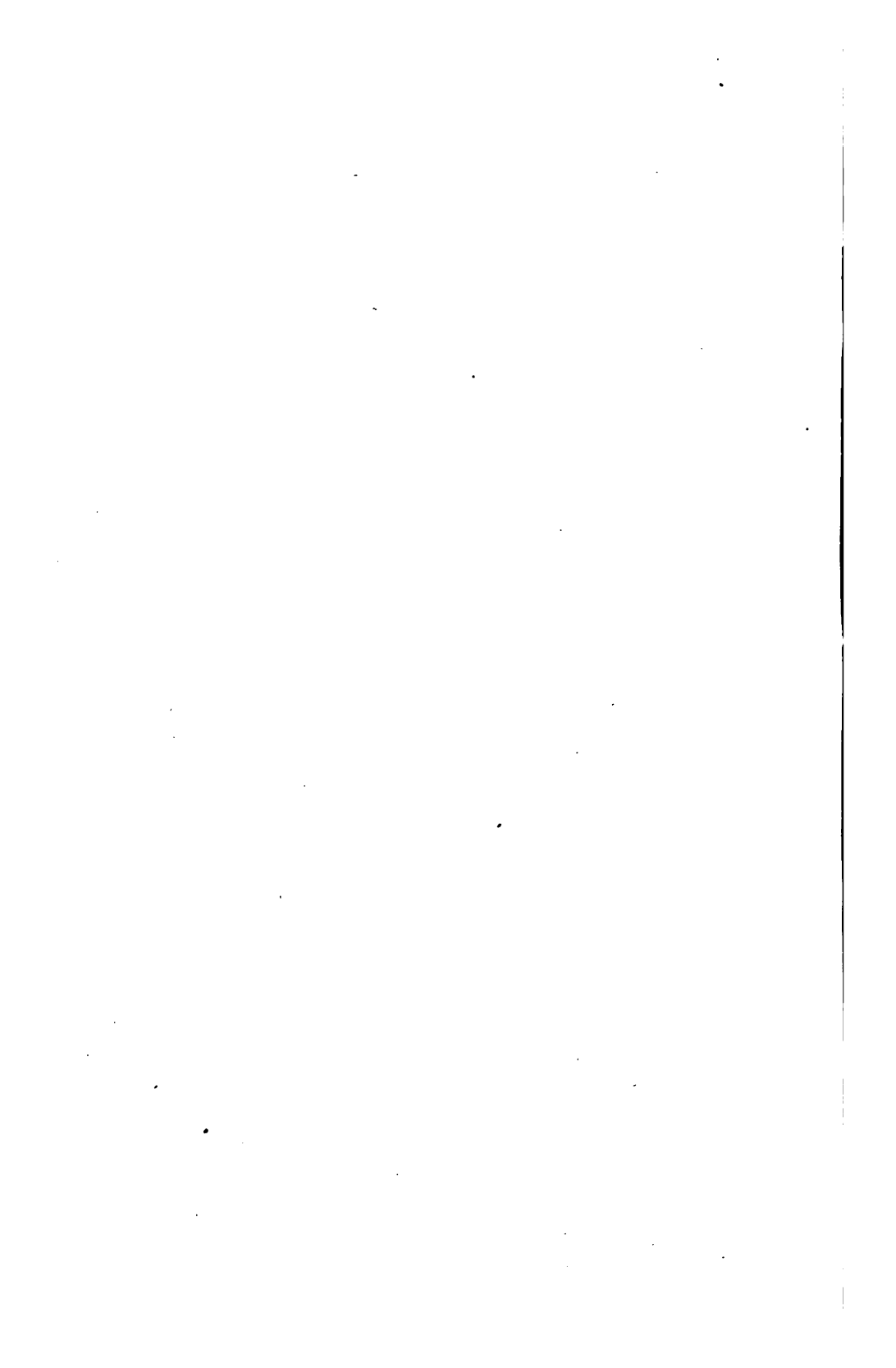
¹ Luke xv. 10, 24.

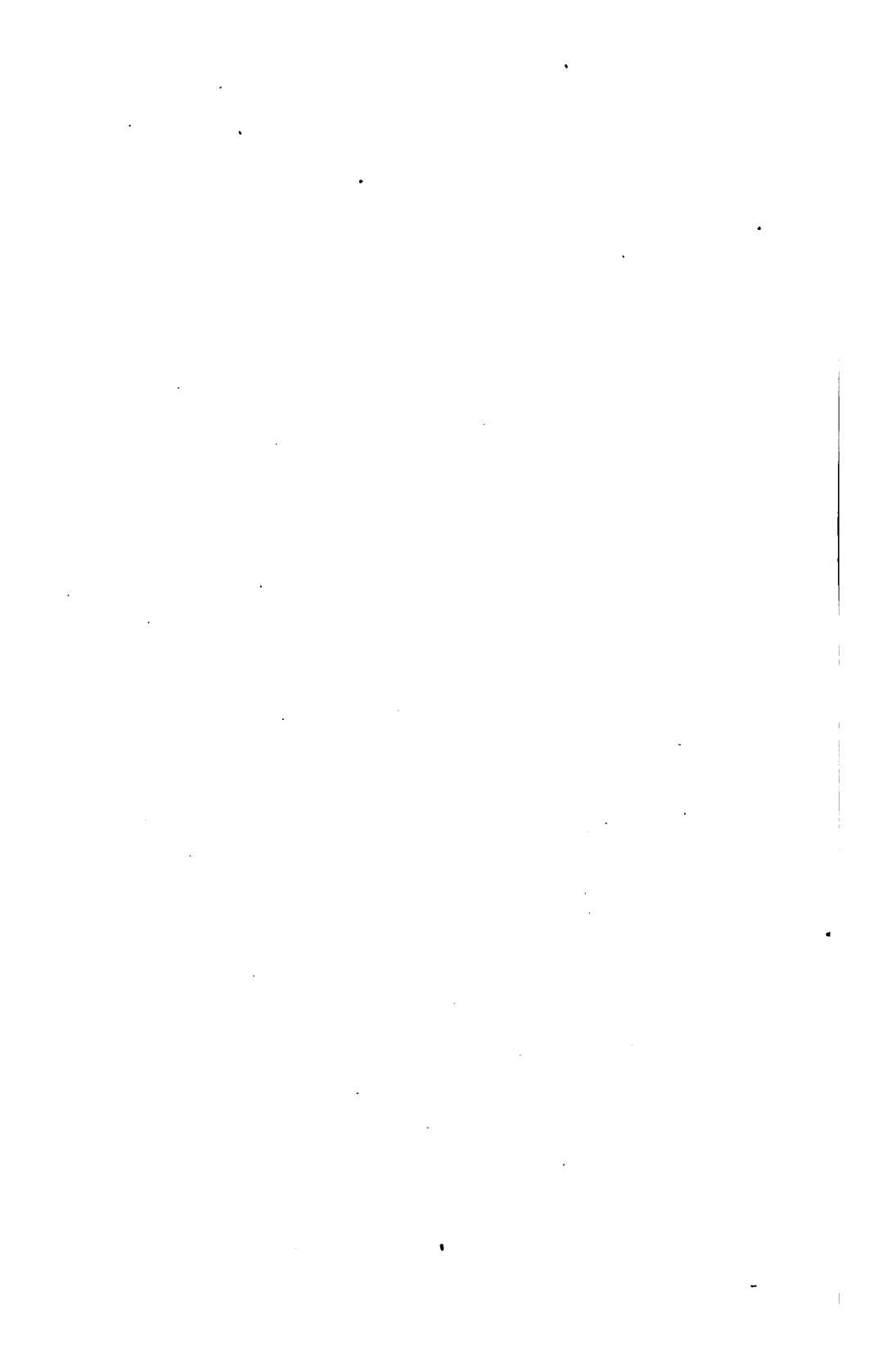
perceive the joy of angels ; then we recognise (if we may so say) the happiness and the joy of God. Look at such an one—look at that constant, serene, cheerful, open countenance. Listen to his free, hearty, genial laugh. See how the cares, and perplexities, and doubts of this world pass by him as though they concerned him not. See how from the real griefs and sorrows of earth he draws new strength, new comfort, new life. This is indeed “joy in the Holy Ghost:” this is the joy that transfigures the outward man, because it comes from the joy of the Eternal Spirit within: this is the exuberant, overflowing joy of the Psalmist, when he emerges even out of the depths of crime and sin,—“Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart^c.” “Cast me not away from Thy Presence: and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. O give me the comfort of Thy help again: and stablish me with Thy Free Spirit^d.”

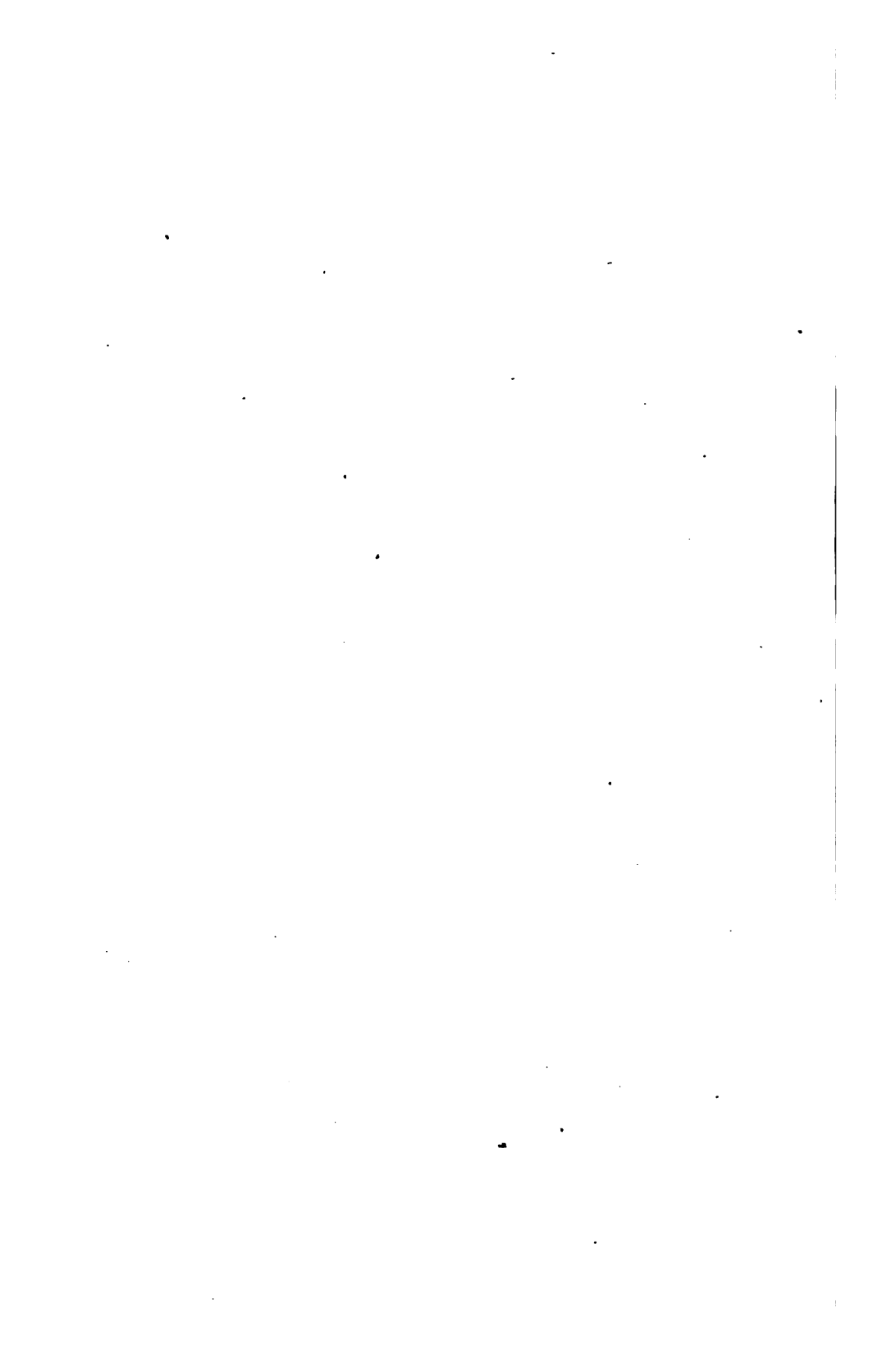
^c Ps. xxxii. 11.

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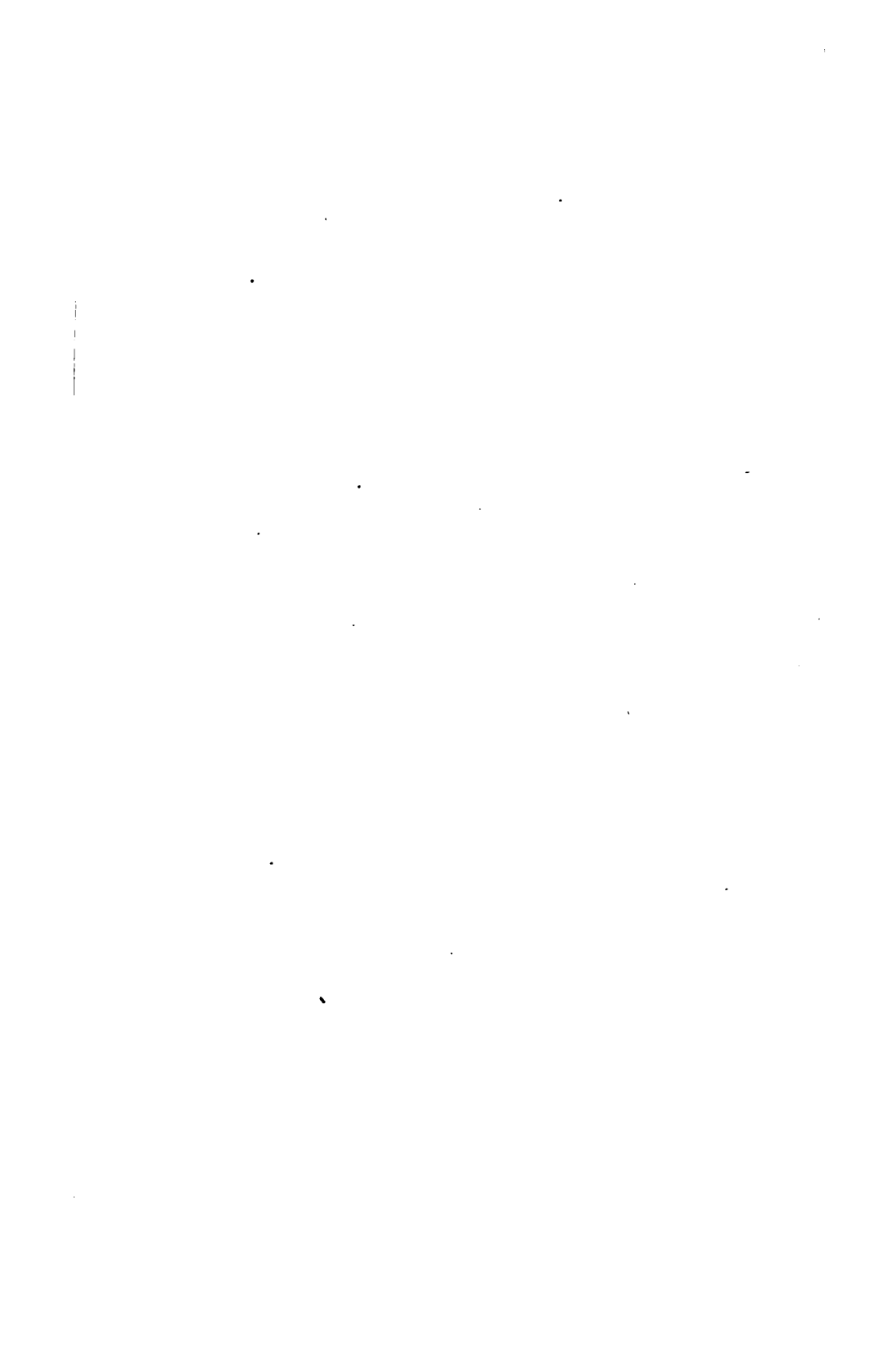




















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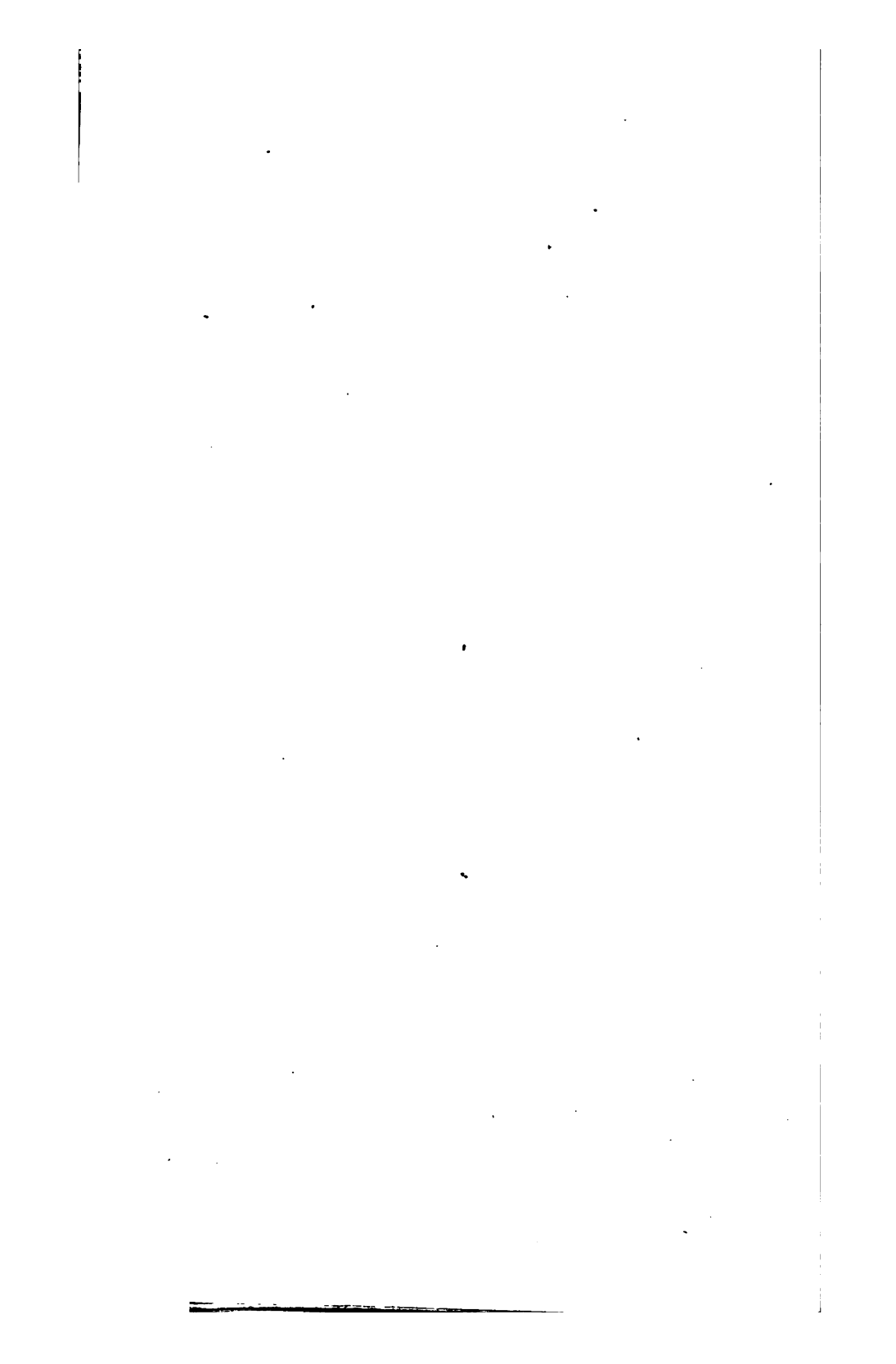
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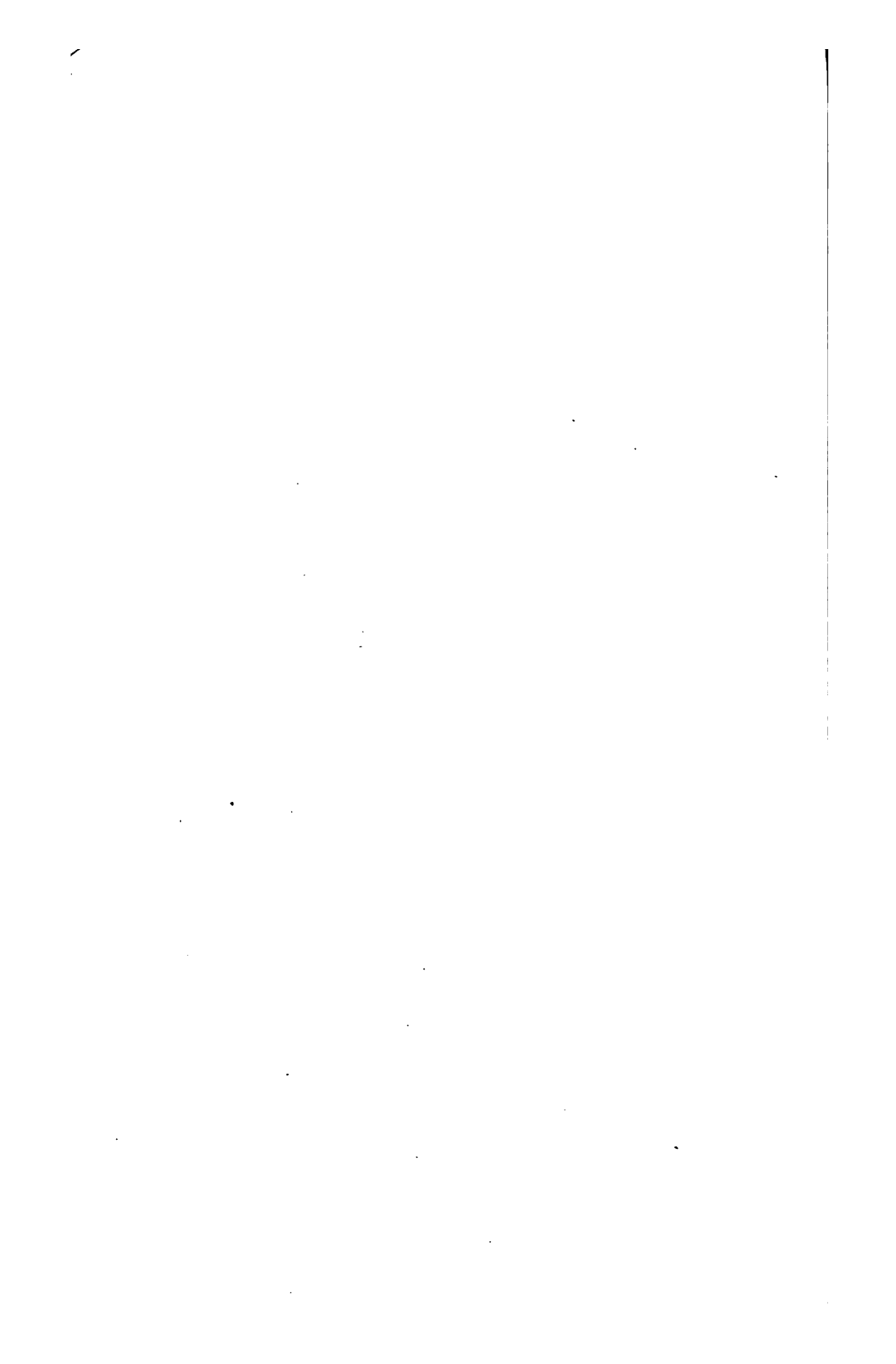
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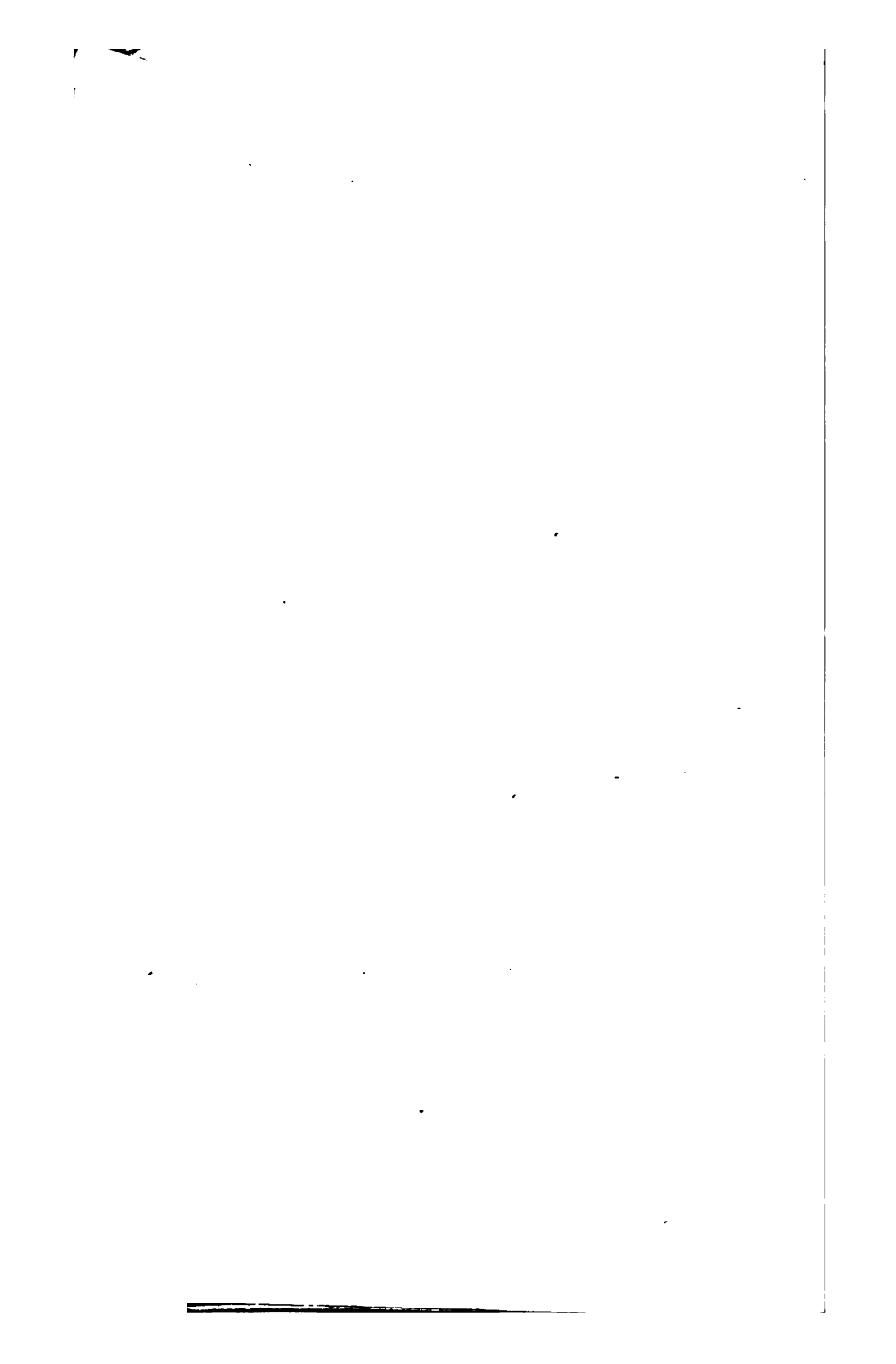






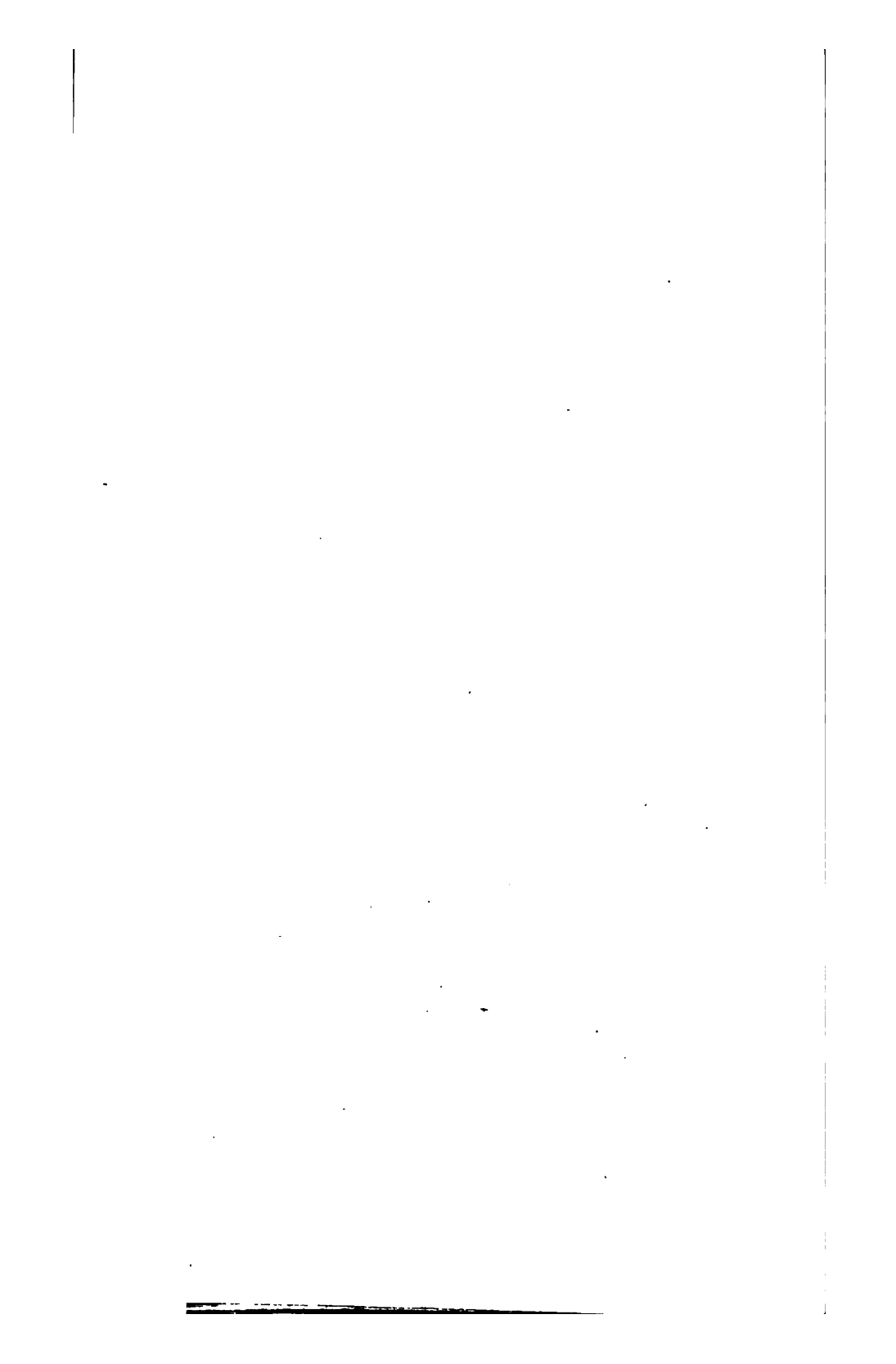
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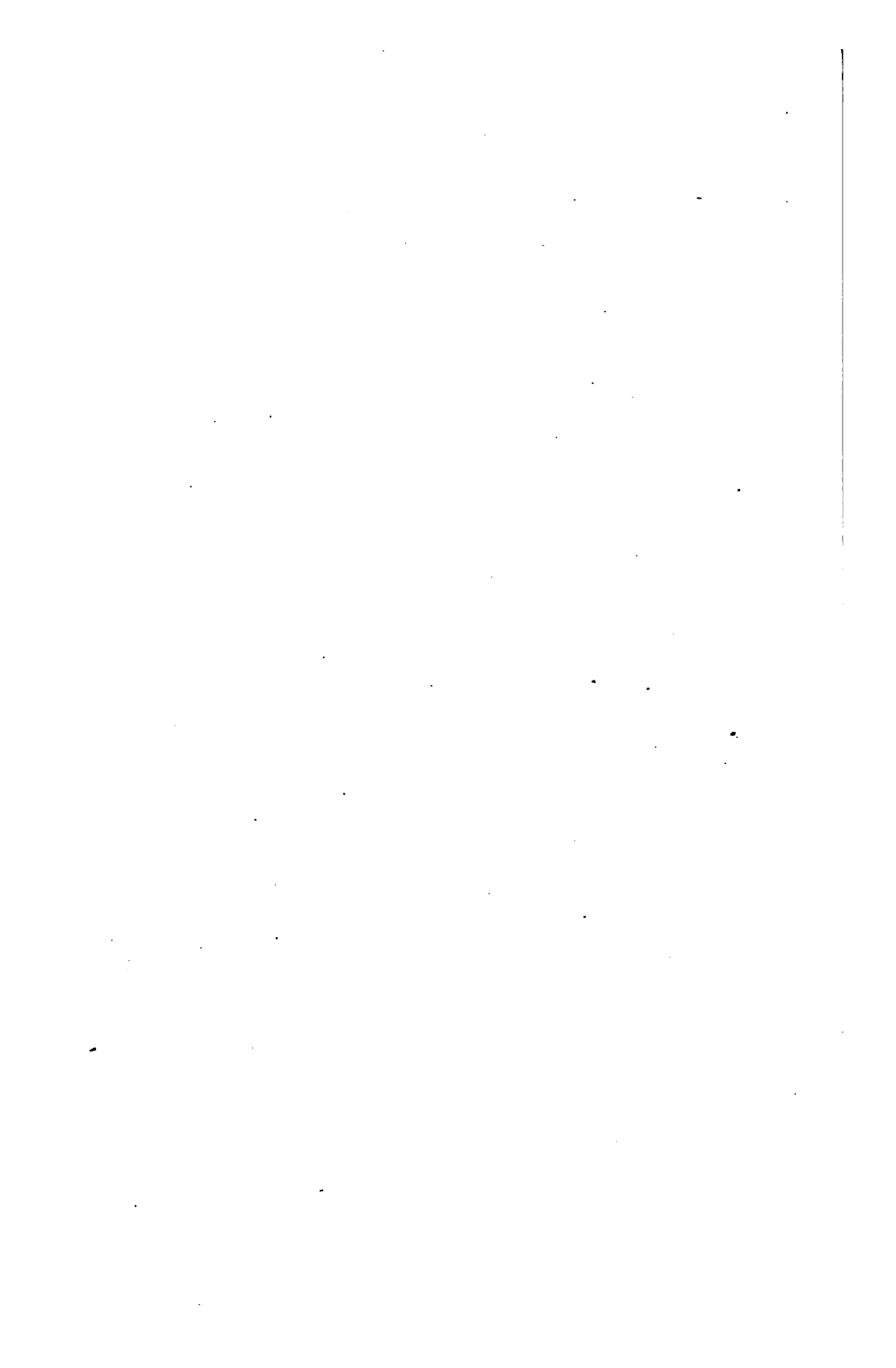












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